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ABSTRACT

This handbook on employee fitness program describes the benefits of developing physical recreation programs in the workplace. Descriptions are offered of various successful programs and their impact on employee health and job performance. (JD)

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FITNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

A Corporate Challenge

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PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS & SPORTS

A Handbook on Employee Programs

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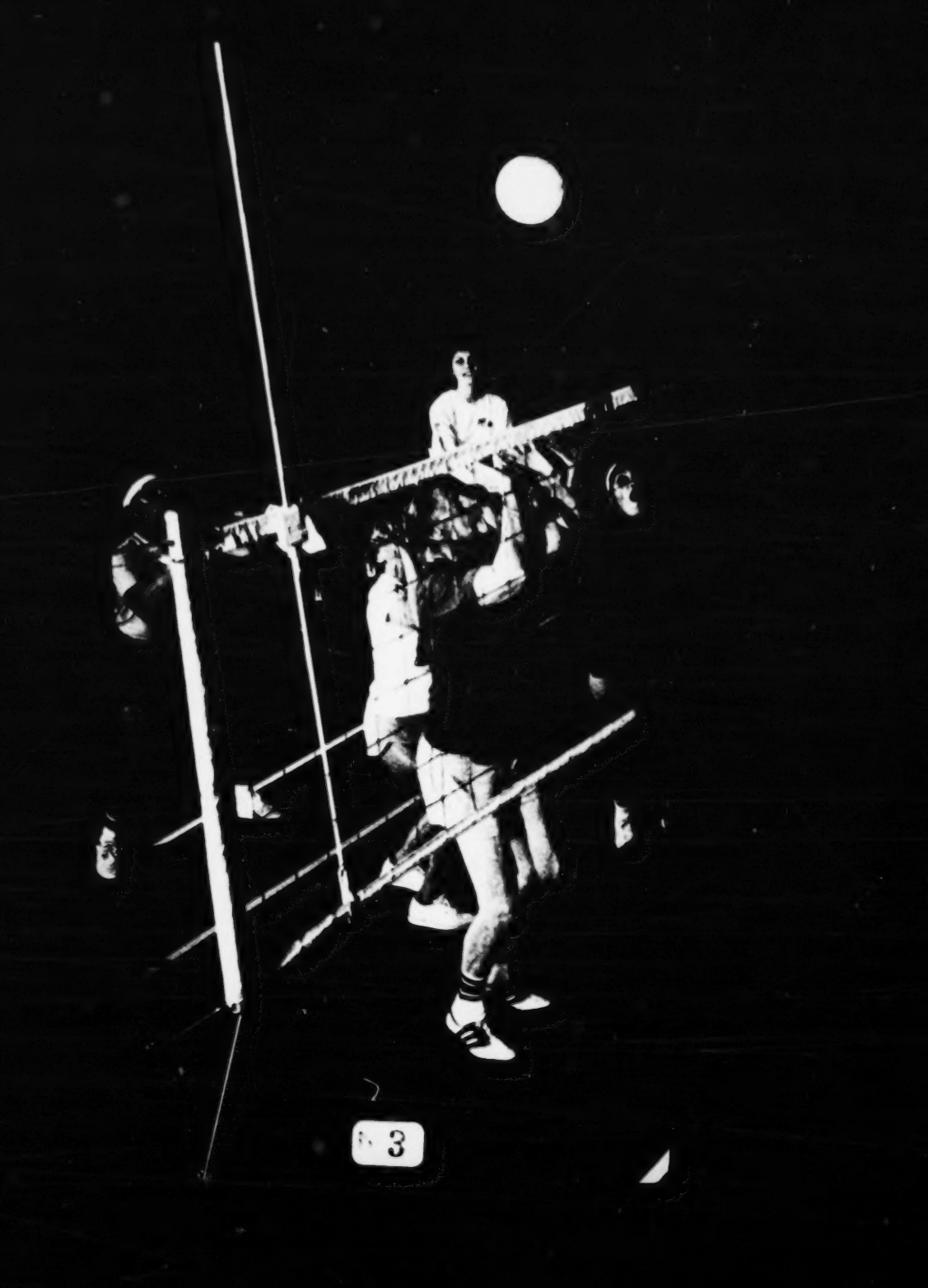
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The Changing Nature of Work

For thousands of years the human species kept strong and physically fit through the exertion involved in the constant effort to find enough to eat. Man's physical nature was well served by a life of running, climbing and leaping in pursuit of game. When hunting gave way to agriculture, men and women spent their days doing manual labor — planting, tilling and harvesting their crops.

Even with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, most manufacturing depended on hard, constant physical effort. As recently as 1850, human muscle power provided at least one-third of the energy that drove the world's workshops, factories and farms. Today, muscle power accounts for only about one-half of one percent of total energy expenditure.

As society has changed, dramatically altering the context and meaning of work, man's body has remained the same. His need for regular, vigorous exercise to keep that body fit is no different now than it was in the days when he was a hunter or a tiller of the soil.

But 20th-century men and women spend their days in a workplace that is all too often a bleak environment for meeting their physiological needs. The predictable consequences are seen in a dire assortment of degenerative diseases that beset bodies whose systems — particularly the muscular and cardiorespiratory systems — have weakened from lack of exercise.

The Benefits of Fitness Programs In the Workplace

Enlightened management *can* fight back against what has been referred to as "an epidemic of degenerative disorders." The physical activity once inherent in the work itself can be replaced. Fitness programs, facilities, along with screening, training, supervision and time to use them, can give all employees the chance to develop physical and mental fitness on the job. Research suggests that not only will the health of the workers improve, but that the quality of their work also will be enhanced.

Management naturally wants to know what are the cost effective benefits of providing regular physical fitness activities in the workplace. Although substantial data are just beginning to surface there is ample evidence that a strong positive relationship exists between fit employees and increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, fewer worksite accidents, less employee turnover, improved morale and decreased health care costs to the employer.

Some companies hesitate to launch fitness programs because they fear they will be liable for injuries to employees. On-site experience, however, shows that this risk is minimal where fitness programs are properly designed and supervised. Anything a company does for its employees — whether a company outing or softball league — involves some liability. A high-quality fitness program should be recognized as an integral part of the job, under which the employee is fully protected by Workmen's Compensation and/or private insurance.

As physical activity vanished from the work environment, the incidence of coronary heart disease, hypertension, stress, and other cardiovascular conditions rose alarmingly.

Although the number of deaths from diseases of heart and blood vessels has decreased in recent years, the figures remain high. Heart disease, stroke and related disorders claim as many lives as all other causes of death combined. Heart attack is the leading cause of death, with the danger of heart attack increasing as the number of risk factors increase.

Medical authorities agree that regular exercise is not only requisite to good health, but excellent insurance against many degenerative diseases. Exercise reduces the risk of coronary heart disease and sudden death, especially for obese and hypertensive persons; helps control high blood pressure, and obesity; is often effective in managing diabetes; and, alleviates symptoms of mild depression and anxiety.

Fitness programs in the workplace are not a magic formula for health and longevity, but the unassailable evidence is that employee fitness programs improve the physical well-being of the business as well. Good health *is* good business.

Because employee fitness programs work for the benefit of all, they are highly recommended by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports for both private industry and government agencies. This booklet is designed to help companies recognize these benefits and implement realistic programs in their own workplace.

What's Happening in Workplace Fitness

The first true fitness program in an American firm began in 1894 at the National Cash Register Company in Dayton, Ohio, when the president, John H. Patterson, authorized morning and afternoon exercise breaks for employees. Patterson proceeded to install a gymnasium and built a 325-acre park for National Cash Register people and their families. Since then, company-sponsored recreational facilities have become commonplace.

Today, more than 1,000 companies in the nation have established fitness programs. Many either have their own facilities or arrange for employees to participate in activities at Y's, Jewish Community Centers, hospitals, community colleges, adult education classes and exercise clubs.

In 1974, the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports organized a small group of fitness directors to give national leadership to a new enterprise. The Association for Fitness Directors in Business and Industry, now known as the Association for Fitness in Business (AFB), has grown to include more than 3,000 members, and is the trade organization for health and fitness professionals committed to the belief that "fitness is good business."

Many programs were initially designed with the health and fitness of key executives in mind, but the trend is to expand corporate programs to reach employees at every level. Mesa Petroleum, Tenneco, Inc., Atlantic Richfield Co., Bonne Bell, Chase Manhattan Bank, Campbell Soup Company, General Foods, Mobil Oil, Phillips Petroleum Company, Western Electric, and Xerox all have installed thoroughly professional physical fitness centers.

Smaller companies also are realizing the benefits of fitness programs. When in-house facilities are not available, businesses contract with existing facilities and programs to arrange for special employee packages or discounts.

Nearly 50,000 business organizations have some sort of organized recreational pro-

grams; these cover a spectrum that includes sports teams and jogging tracks, as well as glee clubs and dramatic societies.

Recreation is an omnibus term and does not necessarily mean the kind of regular, vigorous exercise the experts say is essential to improve and maintain fitness. Employee sports programs that fail to include training and fitness-related activities may even be dangerous, since deconditioned, symptomatic people who throw themselves into a strenuous sport may exceed their physical capacity.

Some companies provide only such essential facilities as lockers, showers and bicycle racks, which at least allow employees to use adjacent park or community recreational facilities. Others spend upwards of $3.5 million to develop extensive facilities and programs. Some make time available on a 50-50 basis at the beginning or end of the day, or during an extended lunch period. Others leave it up to the employee to participate on his or her own time. It is, however, highly recommended that the programs be conducted on company time for purposes of consistency, motivation and supervision.

Employees at all levels often work out together but, in some programs such as the one offered by Pepsico's upstate New York headquarters, executives exercise in an area adjacent to yet separate from the one used by other employees. Reasons cited for this type of arrangement include a desire to create a less competitive and more-relaxed atmosphere.

Most in-house programs are available to the employee free of charge; moreover, some companies actually pay employees to run, swim, bicycle or attend aerobic exercise classes. Others motivate their employees to participate by subsidizing a percentage of

the fee for outside programs or paying back employees who successfully meet pre-arranged participation criteria. A few truly innovative companies reward exercisers with a free breakfast or lunch.

Several large insurance providers like Travelers, Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Prudential offer discounts to companies that provide fitness programs for their employees. As employers' contributions to Social Security Disability Insurance, Workers' Compensation and company-sponsored insurance programs continue to rise, fitness programs become an even more tangible benefit.

All business organizations should put employee fitness programs on their list of personnel priorities for the 1980's and beyond. Once management recognizes the fundamental benefits of such a program, the only limits will be those of the imagination.

Federal, state and city managers also are realizing the benefits of a physically fit workforce.

In 1980, the Presidents' Council organized the Federal Interagency Health/Fitness Council (FIHFC) to help develop federal fitness programs.

The FIHFC has grown from 25 members representing government agencies interested in employee fitness to 285 members in 1986.

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Why Fitness Programs on the Job?

Mounting evidence from both domestic and foreign research and reports from upper management show that workers taking part in regular physical activity programs miss fewer workdays when they do get sick, are less vulnerable to accidents, have a higher overall work output, and suffer fewer emotional disorders and physical disabilities.

Initial research and reports from Tenneco, Inc. in Houston, Canada Life Assurance Co., New York Telephone and the Dallas school system are yielding evidence that exercise programs help "firm up" the corporate "bottom line."

The benefits of a good fitness program also take more subtle but no less significant forms. Participants in a well-known NASA employee study reported a general sense of well-being that improved their attitudes about their work and enriched their leisure time.

And, many managers justify corporate fitness programs on their potential to help recruit top-quality employees to their firm.

It takes five to ten years of broad-based data collection and analysis to make definite conclusions, but the positive association between physical fitness and its potential to keep health care costs down seems to be enough to convince many key corporate decision-makers to make fitness their business.

In light of National health care costs, and the incidence of chronic disease and disabilities, the evidence supporting corporate fitness programs gains in significance:

- In 1984, the Nation's health bill was $387.4 billion.
- Some 63 million Americans have one or more forms of heart disease.
- More than 1.5 million Americans, many at the peak of their corporate career, have heart attacks each year and more than 550,000 of them die.
- The estimated economic cost of cardiovascular disease in the U.S. is $80 billion.

- High blood pressure afflicts 58 million Americans, contributing to more than 750,000 deaths from cardiovascular and related diseases annually.
- Approximately 29 million workdays, representing $2 billion in earnings, are lost each year due to hypertension, heart disease and stroke.
- Back problems are a leading cause of absenteeism and disability in the corporate environment.

Heart disease, high blood pressure, low back pain, premature retirements, excessive sick leave, early disability and premature death should not be normal or routine. Well organized and properly conducted fitness programs demonstrate that there *is* an alternative to the loss of valuable personnel.

At the end of the first year of the NASA fitness program, the participants gave their personal impressions and conclusions:

- One-half reported improved job performance and more positive work attitudes.
- Almost all said they felt better.
- Eighty-nine percent reported increased stamina.
- Forty percent reported sounder sleep.
- More than sixty percent lost weight.
- Half said they were paying more attention to diet.
- Many had reduced their smoking or stopped entirely.

Even more significant, the results of medical tests bore out the perceived benefits of the program. Those who reported improved stamina, for example, showed marked improvement in cardiovascular performance.

These improvements have been linked to dollar savings by companies interested in documenting such changes. According to reports from the Dallas school system, absenteeism among exercising teachers dropped to an average of 5.3 days from 8.5 days per year, resulting in a savings of $452,000 for the school system.

Turnover averaged 1.5 percent for an exer-

cising group versus 15 percent for non-participating employees of Canada Life Assurance Co., and the company claimed savings in total health care costs of nearly $37,000 in the first year of its fitness program.

Initial results on employee participation in Tenneco, Inc.'s fitness program show a positive association between exercise adherence and above average job performance.

Implications of Fitness Programs For the Worker—A Bargain for Life

We have emphasized the advantages of fitness programs to management, but individual workers and labor organizations also have a tremendous stake in such activities. Fitness programs and facilities are likely to be bargained for as intensely as plant safety and health, working hours and hospitalization insurance.

But individuals all too often neglect their own health until illness strikes. "After-the-fact" treatment of health problems is always expensive and often too late to be effective. Prevention is the key and the need for fitness programs is now. There is nothing mysterious about preventing most disabling conditions. For the working man or woman, as for all citizens, daily exercise, in tandem with sensible living habits, is a crucial factor in alleviating stress and tension; it is indispensable to feeling good, looking good, staying well, and enjoying life on the job and at leisure.

We can do something to prevent health problems that make the retirement years of hundreds of thousands of American workers a nightmare rather than the golden dreams of their expectations. Too many of us retire to a life of immobility and dependence caused by preventable degenerative disease, and many others even have that restricted existence cut off by premature death.

The scenario is re-enacted throughout the country daily: A large and increasing group of working men and women, who spend at least half their working hours doing sedentary work, and have lost the muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and cardiorespiratory function they ought to have for a satisfying worklife, foreclosing their chances for fruitful and happy years of retirement.

The Nature of Employee Fitness Programs

A good employee fitness program focuses on regular physical exercise rather than recreational or sports activities, and emphasizes a total program of aerobic, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility exercises. Three one-hour workouts per week are typically recommended.

The programs can be as elaborate or simple as the company wants to make them.

Space-age equipment is by no means essential, nor is a basketball-size gymnasium or Olympic swimming pool. Inexpensive locker and shower facilities, the kind that fit in many basements and storerooms, are adequate for exercise programs as long as obvious considerations of sanitation and aesthetics are maintained.

Jogging and cycling are excellent aerobic activities that require no indoor facilities or equipment. Calisthenics and flexibility exercises can be done without special equipment, though adequate space to move around is necessary.

What Makes an Employee Fitness Program Work?

Successful fitness programs share many common characteristics ranging from strong leadership to effective incentives. They reflect a sincere corporate commitment to fitness and provide employees with the best program possible, depending on finance, facilities and corporate objectives. Features of successful programs include:

1. **High-level Support**
An employee fitness program needs the full support and encouragement of the top administration and the labor organizations to which employees belong. It must be viewed as a necessity, not a fringe-benefit, with substantial personal and financial commitment. When top-level executives set an example, employees are more likely to follow and make their own commitment to fitness.

2. **Strong and Effective Leadership**
A competent person who is knowledgeable in the principles of exercise, group and individual motivation, and business management must be in charge. This individual should convey a personal commitment to fitness and may work full or part-time. Volunteers from within the company can be recruited and trained if resources prohibit hiring additional staff.

3. **Availability**
Employees are more likely to use programs that are convenient to the workplace and provide changing and shower facilities. A concentration of group activities should be offered at the start, middle and end of the workday, the most popular times to work out. Some companies offer employees the flexibility to schedule workouts at times convenient to their workload and acceptable to their

supervisor. If so, the facility should be available throughout the day. If an off-site program is used it should be easily accessible to the workplace.

4. **Assessment and Periodic Testing**
All employees should have access to health and fitness assessments prior to participating in the company program. Screening should be totally confidential and employees should feel secure that their performance will in no way jeopardize their jobs. The screening can range from an extensive overall annual physical to a low-cost assessment of blood pressure, strength, endurance, flexibility and body fat. This initial evaluation should be designed to identify high risk employees and give baseline data used to gauge improvements. Testing should be done at periodic intervals throughout the employee's participation in the program.

5. **Recording**
Attendance, activity and progress records should be kept so that improvements can be monitored and recognized. These records should be accessible to the employee and periodically reviewed by the director to keep fitness programs effective and challenging. Many companies keep these records on computers which also calculate such data as the number of calories burned per workout.

6. **Professional Environment**
Corporate fitness programs should be conducted in a professional manner. Although the atmosphere should be upbeat, participants should know that their involvement is being taken seriously. The showers must work, the gym should open on schedule and an exercise leader should be available to offer instruction and answer questions. The fitness division should be as well organized as any other office or department within the company.

7. **Personalized and Effective Programs**
Each individual's fitness program should be carefully designed to help him/her reach the goals set during the initial screening. Programs should be challenging, vigorous, non-competitive and follow the basic principles of exercise science. Participants should also be familiar with these basic principles and understand the correct techniques and guidelines upon which effective exercise regimens are based.

8. **Total Programming**
Programs that offer satellite activities such as stress management and nutrition counseling, and smoking cessation classes are particularly effective in helping employees maintain healthful lifestyles. Many companies find that fitness programs are more successful when they include the spouses and families of employees, or offer special workshops in the evenings and on week-ends. Exercise becomes the catalyst for helping participants achieve other goals they may have set for themselves such as losing weight or improving at their chosen sport.

9. **Program Diversity**
Group classes should be available in addition to individual activities for those who prefer the companionship and social aspects of a group environment. Jogging, swimming or stationary bicycles should be available for those who prefer to exercise alone. The staff should be tuned in to the preferences of the clientele and continually suggest ways to "invigorate" each individual's program.

10. **Motivation and Incentives**
Recording and encouraging optimal performance is a key factor in maintaining the interest of participants. Incentives ranging from certificates, participation pins and T-shirts to cash prizes have been used success-

fully by employers to motivate participants. The Presidential Sports Award Program is one such incentive that can be incorporated into a corporate program to recognize regular participation in a variety of sports and fitness activities. Materials are available from the President's Council. An increasing number of businesses are taking part in organized competitions and special events such as the Team Xerox Marathon, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Corporate Challenge and the National Fitness Classic which is cosponsored by the Council and LivingWell, Inc.

11. **Public Relations**
Promotion is an important aspect of a corporate fitness program and is largely the responsibility of the director, although staff and employees can play key roles. A satisfied participant can be a program's best salesperson and recognition should be given to those employees who are instrumental in motivating co-workers to get involved. Participation can be encouraged through notices in newsletters and corporate house organs and on bulletin boards. Verbal and written messages from top management can be utilized, as well as special events in the community. Continual effort is needed to keep the program visible and to stimulate interest and motivation.

12. **The Program Should be Enjoyable**
Fun, as well as physical and psychological benefits, should be a major objective of the program. If participants do not enjoy themselves, they will drop out and the program will fail. This does not mean that the physical activity intensity should be slackened. Rather, it means variety, companionship, stimulation and caring on the part of the entire fitness staff.

A Summary of Benefits

The benefits and cost-effectiveness of employee fitness programs are so apparent that the rationale for starting one makes a case for itself. A commitment of both time and money is required and it is always tempting to say, "Wait until next year." But before postponing or rejecting the institution of such a program, both management and labor should review the balance sheet:

- The high cost of poor health, especially of degenerative disease, can be dramatically reduced.
- A higher quality of life can be maintained.
- Absenteeism can be curtailed.
- Higher levels of energy, performance and interest on the job can be achieved.
- Fitness, diet and health habits off the job can be positively influenced.
- Stress can be alleviated.
- Industrial accidents may be reduced.
- Enjoyment of leisure time can be enhanced.
- The improved quality of life can persist past retirement.

Isn't an employee fitness program worth your consideration?

What Do We Do Now?

An immediate, all-out commitment of resources is not necessary. There are as many approaches to be taken as there are varieties of fitness programs and as much care should be taken in planning your fitness program as for any other new personnel or business venture. Consult the experts and consider your options.

Some Programs to Be Considered

1. **Complete On-Site Program**
Many companies are eager to have a complete facility and program on-site. This may be accomplished by phasing in the program over a three-to-five-year period. Some will choose to build an elaborate facility, while others refurbish an existing area at minimal expense. In either case, recruiting a well-trained health/fitness director and hiring a competent support staff will be top priority.

Some companies invest too heavily in facilities and fail to make adequate provision for staff. Leadership is the key to success of any program and consequently requires first consideration.

2. **On-Site Facility With Outside Help**
Some companies prefer to have a facility on-site but would rather contract with an outside organization to run the program. There are many groups and organizations that provide this service for a reasonable fee.

This arrangement relieves the sponsoring company of taking on new staff but gives it access to solid professional leadership. Such groups as the YMCA, Association for Fitness in Business, American College of Sports Medicine, and some consulting organizations offer these services or can serve as a resource.

3. Contract For Complete Program
Many smaller companies find it reasonable to contract out the entire program, an especially desirable option when the contract facility is near the workplace. YMCA's are playing a major role here, as are reputable private clubs and spas. The goal is still a professional program that meets the needs that have been outlined.

4. **Share-Cost Program**
This is a special incentive arrangement whereby a company agrees to share (usually on a 50-50 basis) the cost of an employee's exercise program at a local YMCA, health club, or other reputable fitness establishment. The agreement is valid only if the employee can certify that attendance is regular.

5. **Finger-Tip Program**
Some companies may opt to provide minimum exercise facilities for those already committed to health and fitness. When showers are available, for instance, joggers can run at lunch time, or before and after work. Bicycle racks are another convenience that encourages regular activity by those so inclined.

Obviously, this approach will do little to reach the sedentary and makes no provisions for the high risk individual for whom strenuous running or biking is not appropriate. It is, however, a beginning.

6. **Paper Program**
Health assessment, health education and promotional campaigns are inexpensive ways to encourage some employees to start exercising on their own. The vast majority, however, will not be moved so easily to make changes in their habits. Like the finger-tip program, it is a beginning and may generate widespread interest in the future. And a paper program will allow referrals to non-company programs that can pick up the ball.

No company is too large or too small to establish a fitness program for its employees. As competition for human resources and dollars becomes keener in all businesses, the competitive edge will go increasingly to organizations whose employees are the most loyal, stable, productive, fit and healthy.

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